Blood Red Cloak

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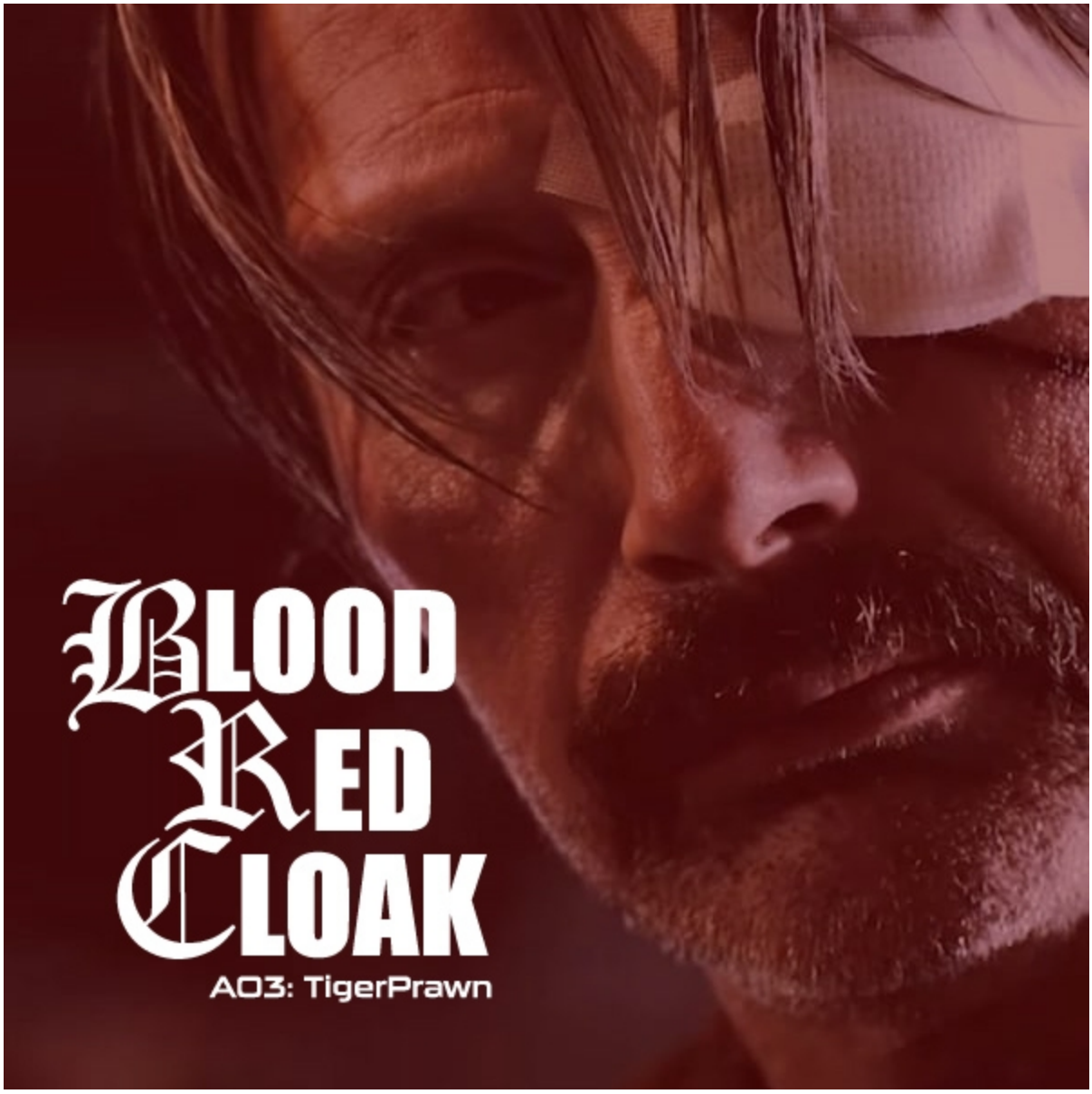
Blood Red Cloak

by TigerPrawn

Summary

When Aiden goes looking for his grandmother, he finds someone else has taken up residence in her cottage.

NB: I had originally thought this would become smutty, but it just felt a little forced in this short fic so it's teen and up on this occasion. But if you've not read it before and were interested in some Blackwolves werewolf AU smut then check out Scented which I wrote a while back :)



Aiden beat his way through the dense thicket as the evening drew in.

For the longest time he wondered if he had gotten turned around and lost, despite how well he remembered this place. He had come here so many times as a child that he was sure he could walk these woods blindfolded and find his way to his grandmother's house despite the heavy snow that had been falling the last few days.

The thought brought a small lump to his throat. He had missed his grandmother so much, he had never wanted to leave her but he'd had no choice.

His father beat him one time too many and when he stood up for himself for once, he had half killed the man. He ran once he realised that his father had set the law on him. He'd be pulled before a magistrate and sent down for attempted murder. They would never understand his side, that his father had done the same to him since childhood. Since his mother left them.

In some ways, the decision had been a good one. He was free now. Free from his father and the life he had planned for him. Had he stayed he would have become a smith like his father and continued to bear the brunt of his anger. All Aiden had wanted to do was draw and paint, and now these years later he had made his living travelling across Europe and painting portraits of any lord or lady who desired them.

Every now and then he would pass close enough to his hometown to make enquiries, and this time on doing so, he had discovered his father had finally drunk himself to death. And now he truly was free of the man. He knew he might always be wanted by the law, but he had never feared them half as much as his father.

And the first thing he could think to do with that freedom was visit his grandmother.

It had been years and she was his one regret, he had never wanted to leave her. He only hoped she was in good health and remembered him as fondly as he did her. As he drew closer to where he knew her cottage must be, he felt a sense of foreboding. This was the way, he was certain, but it had become so overgrown as to be almost impassable. It didn't help that snow was starting to fall, immediately heavy and obscuring. He pulled his fur trimmed cloak tighter around him as he continued.

When he finally spotted the cottage, having to struggle through the thicket, Aiden was filled with dread. It looked cold and abandoned, not the warm and comfortable home he had made this journey to so many times as a child.

He walked carefully from the treeline into the now unkempt clearing, and onto the small porch. Aiden stood for a moment, preparing himself, before finally knocking on the door. When there was no answer, he pushed it slowly open.

"Grandmother?" Aiden asked into the cottage. He had expected, from the outside, that it would be cold and lifeless inside. He had feared the worse. But perhaps his grandmother was simply no longer capable of the upkeep because the cottage was warm. The fire burned low in the hearth though the usual scent of freshly baked bread was missing.

That concerned Aiden and he moved quickly into the cottage and closed the door soundly behind him. If his grandmother was too sick to even bake, when he knew years before that many brought ingredients to her so that she might make them something fresh and warm, she must be ailing.

"Grandmother," Aiden called out again, feeling shame and guilt at having left her for so long. He moved quickly through the small cottage and opened the door to her bedroom.

And there he stopped, seeing the large form that lay in her bed, breathing deeply enough to snore. A manly, beastly sound.

"Grandmother?" Aiden was confused, scared.

A growl came from the bed and Aiden froze.

"Grandmother…"

The shape in the bed rolled and redistributed it's limbs, its feet poking out the end of the blanket. They were large and Aiden could see the hair at the bottom of the person's legs.

"Grandmother… what big feet you have…" Aiden muttered.

He was concerned but curious. Where was his grandmother? Who was this interloper? Was his grandmother safe?

Aiden took a step closer and the bulk before him stirred again and this time a large arm and equally impressive hand fell out of the bed, hanging nearly down to the floor.

"Grandmother, what big hands you have…" Aiden whispered under his breath, keen now to see who this was usurping his grandmother's home and bed.

Having somewhat recovered from the shock of this intrusion, Aiden gathered his wits and pulled the small hatchet from his belt that he always carried in the woods.

He stepped closer, seeing now the frame of a large man who slept like the dead. His hair was a mess over his eyes, one of which was roughly patched, a scar peeking out from under the cloth.

"Grandmother, what big muscles you have…" Aiden was reminded of the many men he had bested in the past, knowing that his slight stature and quick thinking was more than a match for muscle and bulk.

At seeing the man now, rendering him somehow less mysterious and therefore less dangerous, Aiden felt emboldened to take action.

With the hatchet in hand, Aiden sprang onto the bed, his cloak billowing behind him as he landed on the man and pressed the axe blade to his throat before he had chance to move.

"Grandmother, what big-"

"Who are you?" The now very awake man growled at him as he tried to push Aiden off, but Aiden simply pressed the axe closer until it was marking the man's flesh.

"Don't try it. I keep this thing sharper than my cutting wit."

That earned him a frown as one big eye stared at him in surprise.

"You'll want to move," the large man beneath him grumbled, no fear there at all.

"Where is my grandmother?!" Aiden growled, pushing the blade tighter to the man's skin. Almost pressing hard enough to draw blood.

The man drew in a quick and sudden breath, not a gasp and definitely not fear there, but even so his eye dilated and something rumbled deep in his chest.

"Go!" He growled at Aiden, "run!"

With no effort whatsoever the man pushed up, unseating Aiden until he fell completely and sprawled on the floor, caught up in his cloak. He kept tight hold of the hatchet as he looked up at the man.

No longer a man.

He began to pant, then moan. Inhuman noises as he writhed on the bed.

As Aiden tried to untangle himself from his cloak, he scooted backwards over the floor. But not fast enough to avoid the man as he dropped onto all fours above him.

“I told you to ru--” his deep, monstrous words were swallowed into a growl as his body contorted. Aiden’s scream was lost in his throat as the man swelled and his skin ripped until a one eyed wolf stood over him.

“What big teeth you have…” Aiden trembled as the wolf loomed over him, opening it’s large mouth, a glob of drool splattered down onto Aiden’s chest and he braced himself for what he knew was to come. Bracing himself for the moment when those large jaws would close around his head and bite it clean off.

The same fate, he assumed, as his grandmother.

Aiden closed his eyes.

The large, wet tongue that slapped against the side of his face and licked all the way up to his hairline was almost painfully rough.

With a gasp, Aiden reopened his eyes and saw the wolf’s grinning mouth as it panted and looked at him eagerly. Like he was a treat or a toy.

The wolf licked his face again before jumping aside and racing around the room, an excited whine filling the air. Finally it apparently found what it was looking for and picked up a stick from the floor next to the bed and brought it over, dropping it on Aiden’s chest and then sitting and watching him expectantly.

“You… want to play?” Aiden asked.

When the wolf pawed the floor excitedly, Aiden began to sit up, finally able to free himself from the cloak.

The wolf was unable to contain his excitement as Aiden got to his feet, leaping forward again, picking up the stick and dropping it once more.

“Oh-kay…” Aiden was bewildered but grateful not to be eaten, he picked up the stick.

The sound of the wolf’s huge tail wagging through the air created a strange womping, his large feet thudding noisily as he jumped about to encourage Aiden towards the door.

A perfect escape!

Aiden went slowly, trying not to make any wrong move, until finally they were at the door and Aiden opened it.

The wolf ran out, galloping around the mess of a clearing, but he was back in front of Aiden before Aiden had the chance to make an escape.

And that was how Aiden found himself playing fetch with a werewolf until dawn. It was only as the sun began to rise fully that he realised what the stick was that he was throwing. One broken half of his grandmother's favourite cane.

*

Duncan moaned as he rolled over, aching from exertion and knowing immediately that it could only mean one thing. Despite his efforts to stay in control, to seek solitude in the middle of these woods and not be triggered into a change, he had indeed transformed the night before into his beastly self.

He was on the floor in front of a fire that had died hours before. He was naked and covered in dirt, his hands and feet ached from running around. Duncan's head thumped as he sat up, trying to get his bearings, trying to remember.

He had been asleep, he recalled, but then something had happened. Someone had been in the cottage before he transformed. Someone had attacked him in his bed. A young man, the face came back to him as though breaking through the surface of a pond. A beautiful young man who looked a little familiar.

Duncan drew in a breath and let out a groan as he remembered what the old lady had said when she had tasked him with caretaking this cottage. One day, tomorrow or many years from now, her grandson Aiden might return. If he did Duncan was to send him to her, where she now resided by the beach. A pleasant place in the sun to spend her last remaining years with a mermaid she had turned down in her youth. She knew that one day her grandson would come back to her and she was very keen to ensure that he was not worried about her.

Duncan groaned again, imagining what he must have done. She had told him at length about the boy, the way he had been treated by his father and then by townsfolk when he fought back. There was still a bounty on his head, and yet he had been wily enough to stay free and safe all this time. Until he had encountered Duncan.

After all these months alone in the cottage he had let down his guard. Something he had never done before, not since he was a young man himself.

Not since before he had become a hired assassin alongside his friend Damocles. A man he had thought was a friend at least.

Not since before he had taken one job too many from Damocles, who felt he was now too old and too slow. Neither of which was the case.

Not since before he had lost his eye when Damocles had betrayed him and left him for the wolf.

Not since he had become cursed to hunt in these woods and be forever a danger to mankind.

Resigned to the worst, Duncan got to his feet, limping with the pain a little as he made his way to the bedroom. There was nothing he could do now but get dressed and locate as many parts of the young man as possible. He would burn them rather than bury them in the hopes that he wouldn't end up digging them up and gnawing on them at the next full moon when a change was unstoppable. The poor boy deserved better than to be gnawed on.

Duncan stopped in the doorway of the bedroom as soon as he saw the lump on the bed. Atop it was a voluminous red cloak, the colour of blood. And Duncan had to wonder how much of it was indeed stained with the boy's blood. From under one side of it one hand draped over the side of the bed, pale and limp.

Duncan winced, hoping the young man was more or less intact and not just a pile of bloody parts soiling the bed.

"What small hands you had," Duncan murmured, making his way to the bed. There was a strange pang of regret in his chest, not just at the thought of not doing as this young man's grandmother had bargained when she had allowed him the cottage. But because the thought of those small hands on him was a pleasant one.

As he drew closer he could see well enough that there appeared to be the shape of a body beneath. An intact one unless his wolf self had done an extraordinary job of laying the parts out. That was something at least.

"What a small body you had," Duncan muttered, drawing next to the bed and taking hold of the cloak. He held his breath as he pulled it back, trying not to think of how easily it would have been to kill the boy.

The young man lay pristine in the bed, his clothes soiled with dirt but nothing else, and a small hatchet held to his chest with his other hand. Duncan huffed, realising he must have instead taken hold of the young man and shaken him until every bone snapped. Which at least was better than a pile of bloody body parts.

Duncan sighed, he really was beautiful. "What small--"

Duncan stumbled back as the boy's eyes snapped open, his mouth too as he cried out and sprang from the bed, hatchet raised.

"This is for my grandmother!"

Now used to his reduced vision, Duncan moved quickly and caught the handle of the hatchet, and the young man's hand too, in one grasp. The other hand he pressed to the young man's chest to stop his momentum. It knocked the wind out of him and Duncan held him tight by his arm so that he didn't fall.

"You're alive," Duncan stated the obvious, as he knew he was one to do.

The young man glared at him, “But what of my grandmother!” he accused, struggling fruitlessly against Duncan’s grasp, this really must be Aiden. “You ate her, and half of her cane!”

Duncan frowned. “She snapped that cane when she told me she would have no need of it where she was going.”

The boy sucked in a breath and looked distraught. “To her death!”

“To the beach. To live with the mermaid.” Duncan shouted back, defensively.

“I…” the young man stopped and looked at Duncan, as though trying to decide whether he was being truthful.

When no further words came, Duncan had to ask his own questions.

“How are you alive? I have torn apart men who did less to me than brandish a tiny axe, but here you stand.”

The boy looked at him as though he was mad, raising a brow and shaking his head.

“What did you do? Lick them to death?”

Duncan frowned back, loosening his grip and then letting the boy go altogether, he was no real threat even with the axe.

“I did not hurt you?”

“I wouldn’t say that,” the young man huffed, annoyed. He sat back down on the bed and then rubbed his shoulder. “After several hours throwing a stick for you, my shoulder is a bit worse for wear.”

“Stick?” Duncan repeated, frowning deeper.

The young man rolled his eyes. “Yes, what is left of my grandmother’s cane. You bid I throw it over and over, and when you were too exhausted, you presented your belly to me until I rubbed it.”

Duncan blinked his one eye and shook his head.

“How did you best such a ferocious beast?” Duncan asked, remembering what the creature that had turned him had been like. A demon of a thing that would not stop until he had near killed Duncan.

Duncan was startled when the boy burst out laughing.

“Best a beast? There was no beast, just a giant puppy. One that I am now inclined to believe did not kill my grandmother after all.”

“I did not.” Duncan confirmed again, “I can tell you where to find her, she left instructions for you.”

Aiden’s face lit up and Duncan felt warmed by it. In fact, he felt a strong endearment towards this young man. And an urge to protect him and never let him come to harm.

“I will set off immediately,” Aiden said, getting back to his feet with a wince before settling back down again. “Or perhaps once I have soaked my feet. They are sore from playing.”

Duncan nodded, lost for words for a moment before they finally leapt from his heart into his mouth.

“Stay, a few days. It gets lonely here. And then, once you have seen your grandmother, perhaps you will come back to visit.” He did not say that he would protect him, but he tried to convey it in his tone. He would never let anyone harm or take Aiden, never let anyone collect that bounty.

Aiden smiled at those words, a comfort in that smile that spoke of the safety that Aiden felt, as Duncan had hoped. “Yes,” he said. “I think perhaps I shall. Even if there is only one bed here.”

Duncan felt his face flush at the words, and at the incorrigible grin on the young man’s face. One that let him know that the endearment was mutual.

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